



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

INSIDE TRACKS

Young hunters and experienced hunters: Get the best meat from your game animal by following the tips of an expert!

AFTER THE SHOT: PROPER CARE OF YOUR GAME ANIMAL

By Wes Plummer, Hunter Education Instructor, and Owner of Lower Valley Meat Processing Company

You've just made a nice shot right through the vital area of a nice deer (Remember: avoid head and neck shots; it's important to shoot a deer in the heart-lung area so they bleed properly). After calming down you walk up slowly and admire your prize. It may be a nice doe, a fork-horn, or a mature buck, all trophies worth taking a picture of. Now comes one of the most important parts of the hunt. First you need to validate your tag, making sure to cut out the first and second digits of the day followed by the month. Your tag must then be placed on your animal in a visible manner. I recommend using electrical tape. The leg or antler is a good place to attach your tag.

The job of field dressing is the most important factor in the outcome of your venison. It doesn't matter what brand of knife you use or the length of the blade, as everyone has his or her own preference. Your choice of a knife may even be one that has been handed down by a grandparent.

As you begin to field dress your animal, you can start at the sternum or in the pelvic area, whichever you prefer. Be sure to remove the complete rectum and bladder tract (tying it closed if needed). Also make sure to cut through the diaphragm, removing the heart, lungs, and windpipe. This is all necessary to allow your carcass to cool down properly. If you have access to water or snow, you may also rinse the cavity.

Large animals such as elk and moose or animals harvested during warm weather may have to be skinned and



ASK THE EXPERT!

Besides being a Hunter Education Instructor, Wes Plummer knows how to get the best meat from your animal.

quartered. If it is necessary to bone the meat out, be sure to leave evidence of sex naturally attached. Failing to do so is a Fish, Wildlife & Parks violation.

Hunters and sportsmen, it is up to us to give hunting a good reputation. Please be patient if you are hunting with a partner that is not sure of what to do. It is important to take the time to show this person the correct way to properly field dress their animal. This is so important of kids with their first big game animal. It should be a positive experience for both of you.

There are videos available for new or inexperienced hunters that show how to field dress and even cut game. Most local meat processors will gladly grind and package your trim if you choose to do your own cutting. Cutting your game will

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A great year to take a kid hunting!

Whitetail populations in northwest Montana are very strong, and 12-15 year-old hunters can take either sex whitetail all season long.

FWP Biologists surveyed 20 areas across northwest Montana this spring, classifying more than 6,255 whitetail deer. They found an average of 41 fawns per 100 adults, a ratio that indicates good productivity, a trend that the herd has enjoyed for a number of years. These are the good old days for whitetail hunting in northwest Montana!



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Proper Care for a Trophy Mount

By Steve Hofer, Cabin Fever Taxidermy

Fish: Let's start with fish. The less you handle them the better. Never grab a fish around the base of the tail or around the body. The number one thing to remember is to try to keep scales on it. Keep it flat and moist and put it in a heavy-duty plastic bag. There's no magic potions or powders and please "No More Wet Towels". This is an old fashion not-so-wise tail that didn't work then and doesn't now. It can actually take that iridescent looking skin off the scale that gives it that cool metallic look they have and besides, wet towels are a mess for the both of us and can pull scales off too. Never gut a fish. They can still be mounted, but there's a lot more work and cost involved. If you do freeze it, be very careful when you move it. Once the fins freeze they are like potato chips, one slight bump and they are busted. Borax is fine but not needed. Freezer burned fish turn out fine too, if you had one in the freezer for a while. Try not to salt either; the fish don't freeze and it's not needed. Also watch out for fresh ice on cold days; that can pull off scales, too.



Big Game:

When caping out big game the same rule applies: get it in right away. Just because it's in a cool spot doesn't mean your trophy of a lifetime won't spoil. And depending on the weather, it can spoil pretty fast. Elk hold a lot of heat so get them opened up

and cooled down as soon as possible. Bears need to be taken care of right away, too, or it can get sloppy (lost hair) as well as other game. We all know about antelope and how hair falls off just looking at them and that's after they have jumped in a fence all day, not to mention the drag to the truck. You can never have enough hide either, as I hear a big amen from the other taxidermists. Once you think you have enough, take 6 inches more. Call your taxidermist and ask how they want it; everyone is different. It can depend on the type of mount you are doing also. I always tell people to cape it out like you're planning on doing a half mount. With the new forms out, there are lots of options to choose from and they take a lot of hide. Let the taxidermist skin it off the head if you've never done it before.

Birds: With birds, a pair of OLD nylons work great for holding the feathers down flat. And try not to let the dog have too much fun with it. Birds are very, very delicate and tear very easily.

Whatever your trophy is, take it in as fresh and as soon as possible. You have to sooner or later anyway, and the better shape it's in, the better we can do our job and give you back your trophy of a lifetime.



FWP plans to operate six big game check stations across northwest Montana this fall. As far as big game check station trends are concerned, FWP has observed an increasing trend in harvest of most big game animals. Mule deer, elk and white-tailed deer have all increased in our annual check station sample. We have experienced several years of mild winters and subsequent good recruitment for most of our big game animals in northwest Montana. Our wildlife biologists have also observed this trend in their aerial and ground classifications of live animals.

NORTHWEST MONTANA (R-1) CHECK STATION TRENDS

These are the number of deer and elk that hunters have brought through check stations from 1996-2006. This gives biologists some idea about the status of big game populations in NW Montana.

Hunter Year	Total Numbers	Whitetail Deer	Whitetail Bucks	Mule Deer	Elk
1996	24,397	2,569	1,008	201	103
1997	22,766	862	612	218	105
1998	21,457	921	912	238	46
1999	21,617	1,001	990	211	58
2000	21,243	974	951	227	69
2001	22,893	1,767	1,008	240	77
2002	23,682	1,455	978	242	114
2003	22,306	1,868	1,254	311	161
2004	24,332	1,905	1,086	366	171
2005	24,843	1,932	1,107	372	224
2006	21,960	1,938	1,068	288	214

For white-tailed deer and mule deer, buck harvest opportunity has remained constant over the years with no change in season structure. For that reason FWP looks at trends in the harvest of white-tailed deer and mule deer bucks as a population trend indicator. This data is combined with other data such as aerial surveys, ground surveys, telephone harvest surveys, weather data and input from hunters in the field and at check stations to formulate annual hunting season changes that go before our Commission for consideration.

Check Stations and Big Game Trends

By Jim Williams, FWP Region 1 Wildlife Manager

Hunter numbers that stop at our northwest Montana game check stations are another important source of information. It gives us an idea of effort put forth to harvest an animal relative to total numbers of hunters that come through our check stations on an annual basis. Some of our check stations are quite busy. At the Highway 2 check station just west of Kalispell we have had over 1,000 hunters come through in one day! You may also notice that we have student volunteers assisting at some of our check stations. This has been a valuable opportunity for students to gain practical experience in the field of wildlife management.

Do you ever wonder where your deer or elk teeth go when FWP biologists remove them from your animal? We send them collectively, in one large sample in December to Mattson's Laboratory for analysis. At the lab the teeth are sectioned and stained, one by one and then an age determination is made. This is not dissimilar to aging a tree using annual growth rings. If you think about it, deer and elk have a fast growing season in summer and slow growing season during the winter months and thus lay down annual rings of material within their teeth. We also can determine if a grouse was hatched this year or if it was an adult by examining a wing from your harvested bird. In theory, during good hatch years we should observe a preponderance of hatch year birds in the sample versus adults.

This year we are asking hunters to report wolf sightings or wolf track observations with specific locations to FWP check stations as you visit them during the general hunting season. This information as reported by hunters will help FWP manage the northwest Montana wolf population.

In summary, check stations are valuable not only for one on one hunter contacts and discussions between hunters and FWP staff but they also yield an annual supply of critical wildlife management information. We use this information as part of our hunting seasons setting process. Good luck this fall and we look forward to checking your game! Until then be safe and wear your hunter orange.



Getting the Best Meat from Your Game Animal

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make for a good evening the family can be involved in. If you choose to take your animal to a processor, be sure to call ahead. Space and time is limited with most shops.

Good luck hunters! Remember to think game care before, during and after the hunt. A successful hunter not only bags his game but in the process takes home quality meat as well. There are exceptions for any rules. Back country or archery hunters may not have the options that those with vehicles nearby do. Do your best and enjoy the hunt. Think ethics — and whenever possible **TAKE ALONG A CHILD!**


Some game care tips from Wes:

1. Don't skin your game until it is time to cut it up. The hide protects the meat from drying, insects, and bacteria. The animal will cool with the hide on. For smaller animals, simply hang them in a well ventilated shady area. Large animals like elk should be spread out and blocked off the ground with poles, etc. to allow them to cool. The hide will not flavor the meat. The real damage comes from removing the hide and exposing all the meat to insects, bacteria and drying. Then the processor must cut off all dry and contaminated meat.

2. Leave kidneys attached to the inside of the carcass when gutting. This protects the valuable tenderloin from deterioration. Don't cut the hide or bone between the pelvis but instead remove the rectum by cutting around it under the tail and pulling it out from inside the carcass cavity, saving the rounds from deterioration.

3. Wash out the body cavity immediately after gutting. Before your game cools if possible use water or snow to wash the blood from inside the animal. Don't wash any part of the animal after it has cooled out.

4. Do not cut the hocks on the hind quarters as these are needed for hanging the animal when skinning. If possible, leave the legs on your game until brought in for processing.

5. Keep the game carcass in one piece if possible. Processors prefer to work with whole unskinned carcasses from the beginning. 

A Quality Mount Begins with Proper Care in the Field

By Bruce Babcock, Owner, The Montana Taxidermist

Removing the skin from a trophy animal is best left to an experienced taxidermist if at all possible. Their experience skinning the nose, mouth, and ears is invaluable toward producing a quality mount. When a hide is damaged due to improper care or skinning it is costly to repair, if it is even repairable.

Many trophies are ruined because they are not handled properly the first few hours after death. As soon as the animal dies, bacteria begin to grow. Warm, humid weather accelerates the bacteria growth. If you are unable to get your animal into a taxidermist right away you may need to cape out the hide in order to preserve it. The following techniques will help in the preservation of your trophy.


Shoulder Mount

To cape a shoulder mount, start with a sharp knife to slit the hide circling the body behind the shoulder at the midway point of the rib cage behind the front legs. Slit the skin around the legs just above the knees. An additional slit will be needed from the back of the leg and joining the body cut behind the legs. (Refer to Diagram 1 and 2).

Skin the hide forward up to the ears and jaw exposing the head/neck junction. Cut the neck about 3 inches down from this junction. Circle the neck cutting down to the spinal column. After this cut has been made, grasp the base of the antlers and twist the head off the neck (Diagram #3). Then roll the hide and take it to your taxidermist or put it in the freezer. This will allow plenty of skin for the taxidermist to work with. It is better to have excess skin rather than cutting a cape short.

Life-size or Rug

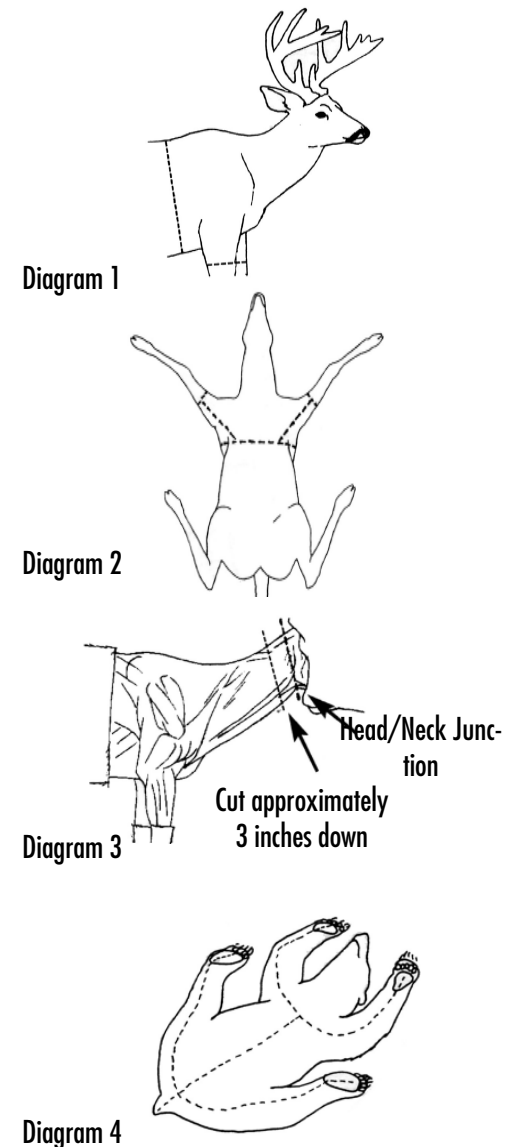
The incision used for rug mounts and many life-size mounts is shown in diagram 4. Make these slits then skin out to the feet and cut the feet free from the carcass. The head is detached as with the shoulder mount.

When field dressing a trophy to be mounted, don't cut into the brisket (chest) or cut the throat. If blood gets on the hide, wash it off with snow or water as soon as possible. Avoid dragging the animal out of the woods with a rope. The rope, rocks and branches from a deadfall can damage the hair or puncture the hide. Drag marks on the shoulder of a deer are not repairable. If you cannot take your hide immediately to a taxidermist it is best to freeze it. 



MOUNTS TO BE PROUD OF

Bruce Babcock shows how proper care when dressing your game will insure a quality mount



Please Avoid Hunting Violations

As the days grow shorter and the nights grow colder, it can only mean one thing: fall is here. With fall comes football, the end to the baseball season, the changing colors of the leaves, and of course Big Game Hunting season. This year the opening day for the general deer and elk season is on October 23, 2005. I wanted to take a minute and briefly discuss some of the most common violations that Game Wardens in Northwest Montana encounter each fall.

- ◆ The most common violation is failing to properly validate your tag. This violation also encompasses failing to tag your animal and failing to keep the tag attached to the animal carcass. This year FWP has gone to a new tag. Please take the time to review the tag before heading to the field and take the time to review the Deer and Elk regulations on pages 16-17. Remember your tag has to be validated immediately upon kill and attached to the animal carcass in a visible manner.
- ◆ The next most common violation encountered is hunting without landowner permission. Montana law requires permission for all hunting on private land. If the land is posted or not, hunters must obtain permission from the landowner, lessee or their agent before hunting on private property. Written permission is not required but

it is highly recommended and it is the hunter's responsibility to know whose property they are on.

- ◆ Another violation is transfer of a license. This violation occurs when a person shoots an animal and places another person's license on that animal. In some instances both parties can and will be cited for the violation. Last year one of our wardens encountered a vehicle and two individuals transporting a whitetail buck at a remote check station fairly late at night. While looking at the tag the officer observed that tag was issued to a female hunter. The warden asked the men if they were related to the hunter and the driver stated that it was his wife and she had to go to work earlier that day and he was bringing her deer home for her. Further investigation by the officer revealed that the female hunter had not gone hunting that day and had not killed anything on that day. Upon completing his questioning of the female hunter she asked the warden, "Okay, what has he done now"? The warden also learned during the investigation that the man did not have a hunting license. About a month later the officer was contacted by an Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Agent who was requesting information about the above husband who turned out to be a convicted felon and was not allowed to possess a firearm.
- ◆ A violation that most wardens encounter involves operating a motorized vehicle on a closed road or off an established road. Remember that whether you are on private, state or federal lands you must abide by the rules that are placed on the lands by the owning or managing entity. For example, Plum Creek Timber Lands are closed to all off road vehicle travel and gated and bermed roads are closed to motorized vehicles unless posted as open. Last year one of our wardens encountered an individual who had killed a nice Whitetail buck about two miles in behind a locked gate. This individual decided to use his ATV to retrieve the buck. When he reached his vehicle with the deer on top of the ATV a Game Warden was waiting for him to return. It seems that a couple of hunters observed the hunter driving behind the gate on the ATV and called the local warden.



- ◆ Another violation that is encountered by wardens is shooting from a vehicle and from, across or over a roadway. You are not allowed to shoot from a motorized vehicle unless permitted to do so under the PTHFAV rules and you are not allowed to shoot from, across, or over any publicly maintained right of way that is maintained for vehicular travel. A more detailed definition of this violation can be found on page 18 of the Deer and Elk regulations.
- ◆ Evidence of sex requirements is another violation that Game Wardens encounter during the hunting season. The best definition can be found on page 17 of the Deer and Elk regulations but suffice it to say that evidence of sex must remain naturally attached to the animal carcass or a portion of the animal carcass until it is processed.
- ◆ Finally, the other violation that wardens and biologists observe each fall is hunters who fail to stop at all big game check stations. Hunters are required by law to stop as directed at all check stations whether they have game or not.

With the most common violations in mind please remember to take the time to read all of the regulation booklets that apply to the animal species that you are intending to hunt. If you do make a mistake please call your area warden or the local sheriff's office who will direct you to a warden who can assist you with your problem. If you observe a violation you can call your local sheriff office, the local Game Warden, or 1-800-TIP-MONT and to aid your wardens in the investigation please obtain as much information as possible (Who, What, When, Where and How).

The Game Wardens of FWP Region One thank you for your support in the protection and conservation efforts of all of Northwest Montana's wildlife species. Without your support and dedication to the resource our jobs would be fruitless.



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Visit our local FWP website: On your search engine, type in "fwp.mt.gov" and click on the "1" on the Regional Map of Montana.

LISTEN...

Listen to FWP's radio show, Northwest Outdoors, on KALS 97.1 FM and other FM stations around the State Saturdays at 7:25 a.m.